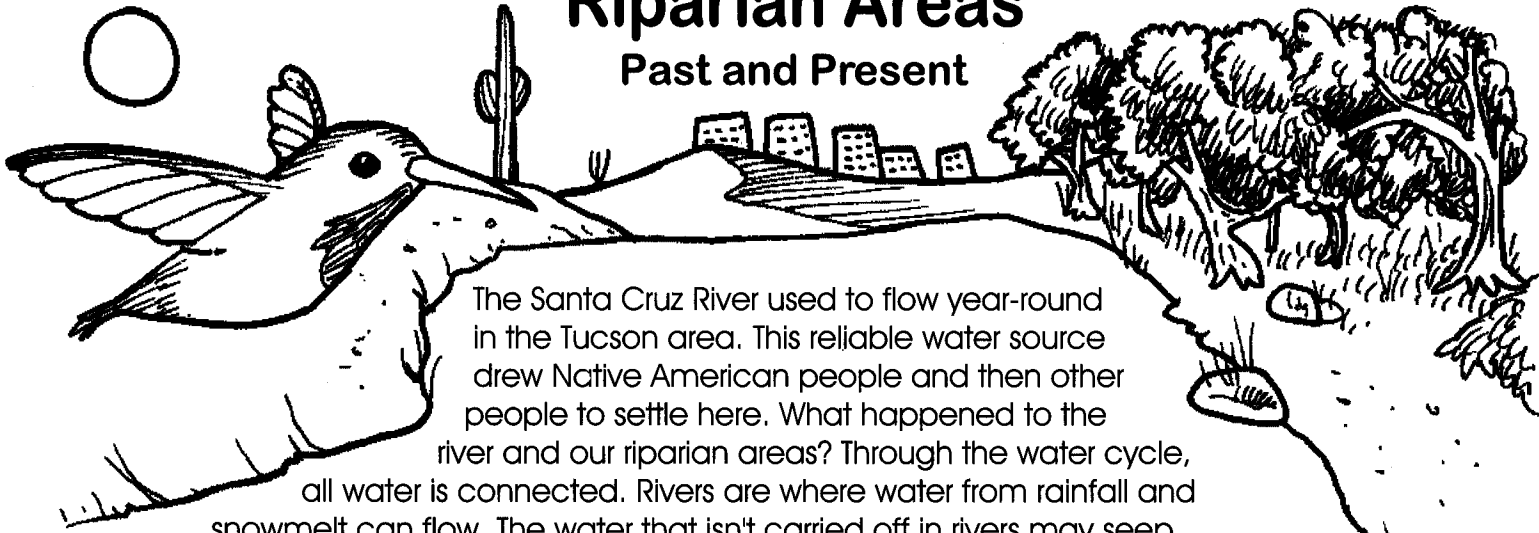


Riparian Areas

Past and Present



The Santa Cruz River used to flow year-round in the Tucson area. This reliable water source drew Native American people and then other people to settle here. What happened to the river and our riparian areas? Through the water cycle, all water is connected. Rivers are where water from rainfall and snowmelt can flow. The water that isn't carried off in rivers may seep underground and become groundwater.

Historically, the water table was close to the surface. The river flowed then. Early settlers used river water, and later hand-dug wells to access groundwater. Natural rainfall replaced the water that people used for a while. Around 1940, there was a turning point. People began using more water than could be replaced by nature. The water table dropped. The river stopped flowing regularly. Many riparian trees, which need to have their roots in the groundwater, died. People drilled deeper wells. Over time, the water table dropped 200 feet in some areas. Most riparian areas disappeared.

In 2001, Tucson started using Colorado River water. This allowed us to use less groundwater and even turn off some wells. Now the water table is starting to rise! But during summer, people tend to use more water. We need to try really hard to save water this summer. Then those wells can be left off, and the water table will rise more. This will protect our remaining riparian areas!

Riparian Areas to Visit

There are still riparian areas that you can visit in and around Tucson:

Sabino Canyon Recreation Area, 5700 N. Sabino Canyon Road - Northeast Tucson:
From Tanque Verde Rd., go north on Sabino Canyon Rd. (Coronado National Forest - \$5 fee per vehicle)

Madera Canyon Recreation Area, Santa Rita Mountains, 25 miles south of Tucson.
Take I-19 south to Continental Exit 63, then follow signs. (Coronado National Forest - \$5 fee per vehicle)

Roy P. Drachman - Agua Caliente Park
12325 E. Roger Road - Northeast Tucson: From Catalina Highway, take Snyder Road east, then go south on Soldier Trail. (Pima County - no fee)

